THE BRITISH ACADEMY

ANNUAL LECTURE ON ASPECTS OF ART
(INCLUDING MUSIC)
HENRIETTE HERTZ TRUST

William Byrd

1623–1923

By

Sir W. Henry Hadow, C.B.E., D.Mus.

[*From the Proceedings of the British Academy, Vol. XI*]

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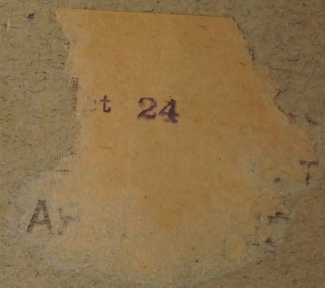
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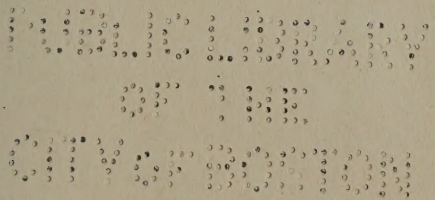

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NOTE

For the facts of Byrd's life, for the list of his compositions, and for the opportunity of studying those that are now extant, I am deeply indebted to Mr. W. Barclay Squire and Dr. E. H. Fellowes. Mr. Squire's articles in Grove and in the *Dictionary of National Biography* form the foundation on which all others must build: Mr. Fellowes's volume, of which I have had the great advantage of seeing the proofs, is now in course of publication, and when it appears will gather into a clear outline everything which is at present known on the subject.

ANNUAL LECTURE ON ASPECTS OF ART (INCLUDING MUSIC)

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WILLIAM BYRD, 1623–1923

By Sir W. HENRY HADOW, C.B.E., D.Mus.

Read April 27, 1923

In the year 1516 Erasmus published his commentary on the New Testament. After the fashion of the time he illustrated many of his points by contemporary events, and so took the opportunity of a text in Corinthians[1] to censure in drastic terms the Church music of the early sixteenth century.

'St. Paul says that he would rather speak five words with a reasonable meaning than ten thousand in an unknown tongue. They chant nowadays in Churches in what is an unknown tongue and nothing else, while you will not hear a sermon once in six months telling people to amend their lives. Modern Church music is so constructed that the congregation cannot hear one distinct word. The Choristers themselves do not understand what they are singing, yet according to priests and monks it constitutes the whole of Religion. Why will they not listen to St. Paul? In Colleges and monasteries it is still the same: music and nothing but music. There was no music in St. Paul's time. Words were then pronounced plainly. Words nowadays mean nothing: they are mere sounds striking upon the ear, and men are to leave their work and go to Church to listen to worse noises than were ever heard in a Greek or Roman theatre. Money is raised to buy organs and train boys to squeal and to learn no other thing that is good for them. The laity are burdened to support miserable poisonous corybantes, while poor starving creatures might be fed at the cost of them.

'They have so much of it in England that the monks attend to nothing else. A set of creatures who ought to be lamenting their sins fancy they can please God by gurgling in their throats. Boys are kept in the English Benedictine Colleges solely and simply to sing hymns to the Virgin. If they want music let them sing Psalms like rational beings, and not too many of them.'

A good deal of this may be due to the longstanding quarrel—the παλαιά τις διαφορά—between scholar and musician; but two points stand out with special prominence, one the writer's condemnation of polyphonic music, second his selection of England as the chief culprit.

[1] 1 Cor. xiv. 19. See Froude's *Erasmus*, pp. 130–1.

They constitute, indeed, evidence of the highest value. Words spoken to our praise may be empty or exaggerated compliments; we may at least take all the credit implied in words spoken to our blame.

Now whether or not it be true that all Arts converge on a common sensibility, and this is in any case extremely questionable, there can be no doubt that each has certain special qualities and modes of appeal which are not shared by any of the others. One of these distinctive qualities in Music is polyphony: the conjunction of different voices singing simultaneously different melodic parts. Literature has nothing comparable with this: a fugue expressed not in notes but in words would be only a succession of unmannerly interruptions throughout which the hearer could make nothing of what was said by any of the disputants. But the musical texture consists of these interwoven strands; they do not interrupt but enhance and corroborate; it is their concurrent variety which gives colour and substance and volume to the whole. Even the plainest harmony, note against note, which allows the meaning of the text to come through unimpaired—such harmony as Erasmus would have approved for the Psalms—derives the greater part of its musical beauty from the fact that the voices which are uttering the same words are setting them on different notes.

The world was slow to discover and adapt the loom at which this texture was woven. Greece knew nothing of it; only the redoubling of men's voices by women and boys at the octave, and Aristotle gives the most convincing reasons for holding that no other succession of intervals would be tolerable. The Early Mediaeval Church, driven perforce by the necessity of having tenors as well as basses in the choir, developed the crude system of organum and diaphony, the two voices singing the same melody a fifth apart, or one holding desperately to a single note while the other pursued the plain-chant. Then began a progress towards independent polyphony in which England was unquestionably a pioneer. We may doubt about our actual achievement in the twelfth century—the well-known descriptions of Giraldus Cambrensis are too vague to be conclusive, and it may well be, as Wooldridge suggests,[1] that so far we were working level with France—but there is no doubt at all about the *rota* 'Sumer is y-cumen in' which at the latest is dated about 1240. That the form in which it is written was already current we know from a punning epigram of Walter Map, that it presupposes a background of great skill and invention is obvious, and so far as our present evidence attests it outstrips the achievement of any continental nation by over

[1] *Oxford History of Music*, i. 161 seq.

a hundred years. Our record, woefully broken and imperfect, is resumed in the fifteenth century when we find John Dunstable acclaimed not only as the greatest of living composers, but as the Master to whom the most notable of musicians from overseas came for instruction. After Dunstable came a breathing-space in which we clearly yielded the palm to the Flemings: in the reign of Henry VII we began to recover our ground, and by the time of Erasmus' commentary we were once more resuming our position in the foremost rank.

But this gradual discovery of polyphonic resource brought its own danger. The device was so attractive that everything else was sacrificed to its display: the music became not only an end in itself but an end too often conceived in terms of mere skill and ingenuity. Three examples may be given. If the words of the sacred text were insufficient to last through a composition, the difficulty was often met by prolonging a syllable over tendrils and streams of melody until it had become inarticulate. Thus in the Conductus *Pater noster commiserans*, quoted by Wooldridge,[1] the first syllable of *Pater* lasts for thirty-nine of what we should call bars, and the first syllable of *fragilitatis* for no less than eighty. Secondly it became customary to take as the staple melody of the Mass some popular or even profane song, and, for its better recognition, to let one of the choir sing it, while his fellow choristers were busy weaving it with descants and counterpoints on the text of the Kyrie or the Agnus Dei. The statement that the words of the secular song were used as well as the tune has been challenged, and it is probable that the first line alone was used, as a sort of title, and that the tune itself was taken in successive portions, as Palestrina, for example, divided that of the hymn 'Aeterna Christi munera'. But in any case the practice was indecorous and gave great offence to the more serious-minded of the worshippers. Thirdly, because composers in such an atmosphere came to have less and less reverence for the service, they took to filling the part-books with puzzles and enigmas which still further distracted the singers' attention. The tenor, for instance, who found that his part jarred at every note with the rest of the choir, was warned by the marginal note 'more Hebraeorum' that he was to sing it backwards. The inscription 'Iustitia et Pax osculatae sunt' showed, to those who could understand, that the same line of music served for two singers

[1] In the best of these examples the words of the popular song are not used, and the melody is contrapuntally distributed between the voices. It must be remembered in all fairness that there was less difference then than now between the idioms of secular and of sacred song.

beginning at opposite ends and meeting in the middle: βάτραχος ἐκ Σερίφου on a blank page signified not that the part had been mislaid but that, according to Aelian, the frogs in the island of Seriphos do not croak. The astonishing thing is that in spite of all this degradation some really fine music was written: there are Masses on 'L'homme armé' and 'Western Wynde' which show true inspiration, and Josquin des Prés, one of the most irreverent of humorists, could show on occasion a sense of tenderness and pathos which has still power to touch the heart: but of the majority, and especially of the rank and file, we may say, with Holophernes, 'Here are only numbers ratified'. Indeed, the condition of affairs grew so serious that the very existence of Church music was in Italy threatened by the Council of Trent; in England closely restricted by Cranmer's Preface to the Litany. In the one country it was saved by the genius of Palestrina, in the other by that constellation of Tudor composers in in which the brightest particular star was William Byrd.

The materials for his biography, despite the researches of Dr. Fellowes and Mr. Barclay Squire, are still very imperfect. But it may be taken as certain that the year of his birth was 1543, and as very probable that the place was the village of Epworth in Lincolnshire. There is a strong tradition that he was Lincolnshire-born: the surname Byrd was common at Epworth in the sixteenth century, and, as the parish registers attest, the most prevalent Christian names in the genealogy were those borne by himself and his children. By a piece of ill fortune the register for 1543, which would have settled the question, is missing from its place in the Church records.

He must have had some sound general education, for we find him in later life teaching mathematics to Morley and writing his dedicatory epistles in good fluent Latin. That he was 'bred up to music under Thomas Tallis' is definitely asserted by Wood (Bodleian MS. 19 D (4) no. 106) and corroborated by a laudatory poem prefixed to the *Cantiones Sacrae* of 1575:

> Tallisius, magno dignus honore senex,
> Et Birdus tantum natus decorare magistrum.

As Tallis was at that time organist of the Chapel Royal we may accept without undue misgiving the current view that Byrd had his schooling in London, probably at St. Paul's Choir School, of which he is said to have been head boy, and that he stayed on for a time as Tallis's pupil. Among the most recently discovered of his compositions is a Song on the death of Queen Mary, which took place when he was fifteen years old, and his growing reputation is attested not

only by his securing as teacher the doyen of Elizabethan Music, but by his appointment before he was twenty to the organistship of Lincoln Cathedral.

Of his first few years at Lincoln we have no record. Then came two events of great importance. In 1568 he married a Lincoln girl named Ellen or Julian Birley; in 1569, on the death of Robert Parsons, he was sworn in as a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal, and so resumed a close personal relationship with his old master. At first he seems to have retained his post in the Cathedral and to have divided his time between his two spheres of duty; his eldest child Elizabeth was baptized at Lincoln in January 1571–2: but in December of the same year Mr. William Butler is appointed there as his successor: and from thenceforward he and his family resided first at Harlington in Middlesex, then at Stondon in Essex, within easy reach of his London work. For some years he seems to have had a prophet's chamber in the London house of that eminent Catholic peer the Earl of Worcester.

It is worth pausing here for a moment to comment on a rather remarkable fact. Byrd was continuously in the service of the Chapel Royal from 1569, when he was appointed at the age of twenty-six, until 1623, when he died at the age of eighty: first as joint-organist with Tallis, after Tallis's death as sole organist. Yet there can be no doubt that through all that time he was a convinced Roman Catholic, that he composed Masses and other services for the Roman Ritual, that he was fined for his wife's non-attendance at Stondon Parish Church, that he was frequently cited before the Archdeacon's Court as a 'Popish recusant', that he dedicated several of his works to well-known Romanist peers, and that he died, as is explicitly stated in his will, a loyal adherent of the faith in which he was born. Yet not only did he suffer no serious molestation—the fine was only a shilling—but he was retained for half a century as a Court official, and was granted in addition special marks of royal favour. No doubt Father Weston, the Jesuit, has left in his autobiography a pathetic account of Byrd's having 'sacrificed everything' for his religion[1]: but it would appear on investigation of the facts that Father Weston was

[1] 'We met there also Mr. Byrd, the most celebrated musician and organist of the English nation, who had been formerly in the Queen's Chapel, and held in the highest estimation; but for his religion he sacrificed everything, both his office and the Court and all those hopes which are nurtured by such persons as pretend to similar places in the dwellings of princes, as steps towards the increasing of their fortunes.' Quoted by Mr. W. B. Squire, *Grove's Dictionary*, i. 430. It is dated 1586.

misinformed. There is no reason to believe that Byrd ever sacrificed anything for this cause: the cheque-books of the Chapel Royal are conclusive evidence that he retained his appointment.

We are all familiar with the Abbé Migne's sentence, immortalized by Matthew Arnold, that 'the Religious persecutions, which defaced the reign of Henry VIII and Edward VI, ceased for a time under Mary to break out with renewed virulence under Elizabeth'. It is not the view customarily held by English historians, and indeed the whole question of religious persecution in the Tudor period is difficult, partly because heresy was so often entwined with political intrigue, partly because it was not always easy to determine what opinions were heretical. But one point at any rate is clear, that in the reigns of Henry and Elizabeth a special immunity was accorded to eminent composers. At first this may have been partly disdainful: Taverner, accused of Lollardry at Oxford, was acquitted because he was 'only a musitian'; but it soon became evidence of genuine favour and admiration. Marbeck was cited, with two other members of the Windsor Choir, for impiety towards the Mass: the other two were executed, Marbeck let off with a caution on the ground that he was too good an artist to be spared. Tye, 'a peevish and humoursome man', was allowed by the Queen freedoms on which very few of her subjects would have ventured: Sebastian Westcote, organist of St. Paul's was, although an open Papist, confirmed in his office because 'tam charus Elizabethae fuit'; Tallis himself, before his appointment at the Chapel Royal, was organist to the Roman Catholic community at Waltham Abbey. Byrd's security of tenure had plenty of precedent in an age when monarchs were themselves artists and allowed to genius its time-honoured privilege of revolt.

In 1575 the Queen gave her two organists a twenty-one years' patent for the printing of music and the ruling and selling of music-paper; part of which they sublet to Vautrollier and other publishers, the rest they kept in their own hands. Commercially speaking, their venture was not successful: musicians are seldom good men of business, and within two years we find Byrd complaining that the firm had already lost 200 marks in clear deficit. But it gave them the opportunity of publishing their own work, in the accustomed part-books, and of this the firstfruits appeared forthwith in the collection of *Cantiones Sacrae* to which Tallis contributed sixteen motets and Byrd eighteen. Tallis, who was then about fifty years of age (the exact year of his birth is unknown), had already taken his place in the first rank of English composition: Byrd, who was thirty-two, had not yet published a note of music. The immediate effect of

this collaboration was to set the younger man by the side of the elder, whom in a few more years he surpassed as unquestionably as Mozart surpassed Haydn.

There follows another of the 'eremi et vastitates' which are too frequent in the chronology of Byrd's life; and the desert is not traversed until 1588 when he is made the recipient of a very notable honour. An amateur named Nicholas Yonge, whose house had long been the resort of madrigal singers, was in the habit of procuring from Italy the best examples of an art in which she particularly excelled. In 1588 he published, under the title of *Musica Transalpina*, a selection which included specimens of Ferrabosco, Marenzio, Palestrina, Filippo di Monte, and other masters, and among them, as the highest compliment that he could pay to our native art, two settings by Byrd of Ariosto's 'La Verginella'. Historians have incorrectly described these as the first English madrigals—Englishmen had been writing madrigals for over half a century[1]—but they were the first which publicly claimed equality with the best of Italian music.

In the same year Byrd published the first collection which consisted entirely of his own work. This was the book of 'Psalms, Sonets, and Songs of Sadnes and Pietie'—thirty-five miscellaneous compositions, sacred and secular, which range from penitential Psalms to the well-known 'Amaryllis' madrigal, and end with two elegies on the death of Sir Philip Sidney. They are dedicated to Sir Christopher Hatton and prefaced by eight reasons 'to perswade euery one to learne to singe', which run as follows:

First it is a knowledge easely taught, and quickly learned where there is a good Master, and an apt Scoller.

2. The exercise of singing is delightfull to Nature & good to preserve the health of Man.

3. It doth strengthen all the parts of the brest, & doth open the pipes.

4. It is a singular good remedie for a stutting & stammering in the speech.

5. It is the best meanes to procure a perfect pronunciation & to make a good Orator.

6. It is the onely way to know where Nature hath bestowed the benefit of a good voyce: which guift is so rare, as there is not one among a thousand, that hath it: and in many, that excellent guift is lost, because they want Art to expresse Nature.

[1] Counting the set printed by Wynkyn de Worde in 1530. Edwards's delightful 'In going to my naked bed', a true madrigal if ever there was one, can be dated with fair certainty at 1564. Whythorne's 'Songs of three fower and five voices' were published in 1571. See Fellowes, *English Madrigal Composers*, ch. iv, pp. 33-4.

7. There is not any Musicke of Instruments whatsoever, comparable to that which is made of the voyces of Men, where the voyces are good, and the same well sorted and ordered.

8. The better the voyce is, the meeter it is to honour and serve God there-with: and the voyce of man is chiefely to be imployed to that ende.

Since singing is so good a thing
I wish all men would learne to sing.

The period with which we are at present dealing was, indeed, one of the most prolific of Byrd's whole career. In 1589 he published *Songs of Sundry Natures*: forty-seven compositions for three, four, five, and six voices, and between then and 1591 produced the two volumes of *Cantiones Sacrae* which, if he had written nothing else, would suffice to rank him among the greatest of composers. Mr. Squire, who speaks in this matter with high authority, assigns the three Masses to the year 1588, though no doubt their composition spread over a longer period, and if the evidence for this is not entirely conclusive we may agree that they are not earlier than this stage in Byrd's career.[1] The problem of dating his work, with any exactitude, in cases where we have no external testimony to guide us, has not yet been completely solved. Scholars who remember the controversies that have ranged round the chronology of the Pauline Epistles or the Platonic dialogues or the works of Chaucer or Shakespeare will sympathize with the difficulty of accurate determination in compositions which fall within a comparatively narrow range of style, and many of which have been too recently discovered for an extended and systematic study. The future will no doubt bring its own answer: for the present we must be satisfied with general principles and flexible frontier-lines.

Meanwhile he was winning abundant laurels in another field of composition. As a player on the virginals he was by all repute unrivalled, as supreme among contemporaries as was Bach later on the organ or Beethoven on the pianoforte, and during these years of strength and maturity he wrote a vast number of pieces—dance-measures, airs, fantasies, variations—for his favourite instrument. Many manuscript collections of them are still extant,[2] among others

[1] Dr. Rimbault, in his edition of Byrd's 5-part Mass, suggested that they were written before 1558, a view which enables us to dispense with the rest of his criticisms. It is like saying that Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth* during his boyhood at Stratford. Mr. Collins believes that the 5-part Mass was published in 1590 and the other two in 1610. See Fellowes.

[2] Typical examples in all forms have been published under the very competent editorship of Mr. Fuller Maitland and Mr. Barclay Squire.

Lady Nevill's book (1591), transcribed by John Baldwin of Windsor, who at the seventeenth piece has broken out into a spontaneous cry of admiration, unusual in a copyist, 'Mr. W. Birde, homo memorabilis'. Some characteristics of the music will be considered later, but we may here draw attention to the amazing dexterity of hand to which these pieces attest. The exaggerated fame which rewards a virtuoso in his lifetime is usually compensated by undeserved oblivion after his death, and it is well therefore that we should have a permanent record of the skill which Byrd evidently possessed and some of which he must have transmitted to his pupils. It is the more astonishing because the virginal players and organists of the sixteenth century were required, by the position of the keyboard, to dispense almost entirely in rapid passages with the use of the thumb and the little finger. Praetorius, who wrote in 1619, has a significant passage:

'Many think it a matter of great importance and despise such organists as do not use this or that particular fingering, which in my opinion is not worth the talk: for let a player run up and down with either first, middle, or third finger, aye even with his nose if that could help him, provided everything is done clearly, correctly, and gracefully, it does not much matter how or in what manner it is accomplished.'

Praetorius, it will be seen, contemplates the clear, correct, and graceful use of the nose in clavier playing, but restricts the hand to the three middle fingers. And the system which continued in use as late as Purcell allows the thumb and little finger only at the beginning and end of a two-octave scale.[1] All the other notes are struck by the third and fourth fingers in ascending movement and in descending by the third and second. Even our masters of technical proficiency might look upon these restrictions with some misgiving.

Byrd was now forty-eight. Apart from the three Masses, he had published, in part-books, over a hundred and fifty concerted vocal compositions, both sacred and secular, and had written some scores of pieces for the virginals. Since the death of Tallis in 1585 he had become beyond all challenge the first composer in England, unrivalled even by the great Madrigalian school which grew up round him. He was in high favour with patrons, with colleagues, and with pupils, as much beloved for his character as revered for his genius; never, we may say, had any artist opened more widely the door of opportunity. Yet this was, so far as we know, the moment which he chose to retire from publication: no printed page of his can be dated between 1591 and 1605. And what is more surprising, it was within this period

[1] See the article on Fingering in *Grove's Dictionary*, vol. ii, pp. 43–5. Mr. Barclay Squire has found some exceptions in the clavier music of Bull.

that the *Triumphs of Oriana* appeared: the collection of madrigals in honour of Queen Elizabeth, prepared and edited by Byrd's pupil and lifelong friend Thomas Morley, as a monument of our native genius: and the name which we should most expect to find is absent from the list of contributors. No satisfactory explanation of this silence has yet been found. It is clear that during this period he continued to write, for he published at its close a volume of over sixty compositions: we do not know why, at the zenith of his reputation, he withdrew for fourteen years from the arena in which it had been won.

The chapter, otherwise uneventful, records a few facts of biographical interest. In 1593 Byrd removed with his wife and children from Harlington and took possession of Stondon Place, near Ongar: an estate sequestrated from the recusant family of the Shelleys, and in 1595 leased by the Crown to the equally recusant organist of the Chapel Royal. It has been suggested that the anxieties consequent upon this change of scene may have been in some degree accountable for his silence: that he may have been preoccupied with personal troubles or dangers and have thought it politic to lie for a time in concealment. But this is on the whole improbable. For one reason the policy would have defeated its own end: his light was too brilliant to be veiled without exciting remark; for another, although he was from the beginning involved in some disputes with the outgoing occupant—the circumstances lent themselves to controversy—yet the tedious litigation with the Shelleys, and the personal distractions which it entailed, came to a head only in later years.

In 1603 James I ascended the Protestant throne, and Byrd, who had been recently excommunicated by his Archdeacon, took part in the Coronation Service and celebrated the occasion by preparing for the press that magnificent collection of compositions for the Roman Liturgy which is known as the First Book of the *Gradualia*. This appeared in 1605 with a dedication to the Earl of Northampton 'in afflictis familiae meae rebus benignissimum patronum', from which we may gather that Byrd had benefited by the protection of a powerful house. A second set of *Gradualia*, equally beautiful, followed in 1607, making up the total of separate numbers to over 100. Assuredly Byrd had returned to public life bringing his sheaves with him.

Meantime he continued his instrumental work, collaborated with Bull and Gibbons in *Parthenia*, and wrote many of the pieces which were afterwards collected in the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book. This direction of his genius was yet more strikingly illustrated when in 1611 he included among his 'Psalmes, Songs, and Sonets' two

Fantasies, in six and four parts respectively, for viols alone: the earliest printed compositions for concerted strings which we possess. Three years later he contributed four anthems to Sir William Leighton's 'Teares or Lamentacions of a Sorrowfull Soule': and these were his last published compositions. On 4 July, 1623, he died. Of his six children one son, Thomas, inherited some measure of his spirit; the others are no more to us than names in a genealogy.

With the exception of Mrs. Shelley, who complains of his 'bitter words', he seems to have had no personal enmities, and the contemporary references to his name indicate not only admiration but affection. Some of them have already been quoted: there are others not less significant. The record of his death, in the Chapel Royal, speaks of him as 'a father of Musicke'. Morley in his *Plaine and Easie Introduction* says that he is 'never without reverence to be named of the Musitians': Baldwin who copied out Lady Nevill's virginal pieces sets him above all other composers English or foreign the anonymous possessor of a MS. of Cicero's *Letters*, now in the Christ Church Library, marks the passage (*ad Atticum*, iv. 16) which states that the Britons are devoid of letters or music with the indignant comment 'Unus Birdus omnes Anglos ab hoc convicio prorsus liberat'. But there is no need of any further witness. It is beyond question that at the time of his death he was regarded with a veneration hardly surpassed by that which was paid to Shakespeare.

> Expende Hannibalem: quot libros in duce summo
> Invenies?

What has become of all this music and this reputation? Why is it that a man who was acclaimed by his contemporaries as a supreme example of creative genius has left a name which sounds at the present day so faint and so unfamiliar? It was not slenderness of achievement, for more than five hundred of his compositions have now been discovered. It was not easy acceptance of a low standard: the Elizabethan age was the most musical in our history. Some very convincing explanation must be found before these contradictions can be reconciled.

We are celebrating this year a greater tercentenary than Byrd's: that of the First Folio. Imagine for a moment that there had been no First Folio: that there had been no Quartos: that no single play of Shakespeare's had survived otherwise than in separate parts, and that of these parts some were in manuscript copies at his death and the others in ill-printed scripts without division of acts or scenes and without cues. This is precisely the fate which befell the music of Byrd. Of his known compositions less than half were printed in any

form during his lifetime, and this moiety only in part-books restricted in use to the singer and easily mislaid. Shortly after his death about twenty of his services and anthems were reprinted by Barnard (1641), but these also were entrusted to the hazard of the part-books, and of Barnard's collection no complete copy is now in existence. There was nothing distinctive about this, it was the common usage of the time, but no better way could be devised of preparing 'alms for oblivion'.

Another equally powerful reason may be added. No doubt it is incorrect to say that the Puritans were hostile to music—Cromwell and Milton are examples to the contrary—but they were eminently hostile to certain kinds of music; and it was not to be expected that they would go far to honour a composer all of whose work was in a style which they disapproved, and more than half of it for a Church which they detested. Nor did the Restoration mend matters, for by the time that it came the whole course and current of musical taste had been deflected. The change wrought by the Monodic movement may roughly be compared with that which Caravaggio introduced into painting: instead of the old diffused light flowing equally through all parts of the picture came luminous concentration on a single point, and, as its natural result, the enhancement of romantic or dramatic effect. The parallel must not be pressed into detail, for the Monodic composers were far greater than Caravaggio, but it is true in principle. The growth of dramatic and romantic music largely depended on this method of concentration, and helped to render obsolete the old contrapuntal equality which it superseded.

The eighteenth century treated Byrd with neglect: it was reserved for the nineteenth to treat him with contumely. In 1840 the Musical Antiquarian Society was formed in London and proceeded to publish, for the first time in score, the five-part Mass, entrusted to Dr. Rimbault, and the first book of *Cantiones Sacrae*, entrusted to Mr. William Horsley. The results were lamentable. We may at any rate give Dr. Rimbault credit for good intentions; he seems to have admired Byrd after his fashion: but he knew nothing about the Elizabethan idiom and he was one of the most inaccurate and unscholarly of editors. Byrd's text is emended where it was obviously correct before, his style is smoothed out of recognition: worst of all, his beautiful luxuriant phrases, admirably suited to the declamation of the words, are crammed into a Procrustean bed of regular bars: a bed upon which Byrd never dreamed that he would be made to lie. This is distressing enough, but Mr. Horsley is worse. There is a pseudo-science called 'Strict Counterpoint' which is set forth in

the grammatical treatises of Fux and Marpurg and Cherubini and Rockstro: a set of rules and prohibitions, the latter predominating, illustrations of which may be found in the text-books but not in the works of the great composers.[1] As a discipline it may conceivably have some small use: as a basis for criticism it is an insolent pedantry. Mr. Horsley, whose musical exertions had raised him to the dignity of a Bachelor's degree, prefaces his reluctant edition with a diatribe censuring Byrd for disregard of regulations which have no inherent validity and of which he would never for a moment have recognized the jurisdiction. To match this example of assurance we must turn to the eighteenth-century critics who attacked Shakespeare's plays for not being regular.

Is it surprising that by the middle of the nineteenth century the name of Byrd had almost vanished from the memory of mankind? A few services and anthems—'Bow thine ear', for instance—still held place in our Cathedral services: an occasional madrigal might very rarely appear on the concert platform: the rest of the treasure lay hidden in its royal tomb unvalued, unexplored, and for the most part unknown. But towards the end of the century the work of excavation began. Dr. Nagel's excellent *Geschichte der Musik in England* aroused a general interest, and before it appeared some of our scholars were in the field, Mr. Fuller Maitland, Mr. Barclay Squire, Mr. Godfrey Arkwright, and others, to be followed later by the Tudor Music Committee and the independent researches of Dr. Fellowes and Mr. Collins. The world has often assigned to its great composers a period of oblivion: the interest in Palestrina was certainly revived by the nineteenth-century scholars at Ratisbon: the first performance of Bach's B minor Mass took place ninety-five years after its composition; when Sir George Grove paid his famous visit to Vienna, nine-tenths of Schubert's music was still unpublished. In the case of Byrd the period of neglect has been longer, but his time has at last arrived.

It remains to set forth briefly the grounds on which a place is claimed for him in the company of the 'di maiorum gentium': not only among the great composers but among the very few who stand at the summit of the art. And first we may observe that he not only covered but notably extended the whole range of musical composition. The bare catalogue of his work is astonishing: three Masses, over two hundred motets and gradualia, a setting of the Passion according

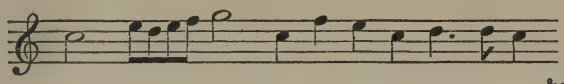
[1] Mr. Rockstro confesses that in despair of finding any examples from the Classics he has been obliged to write his own. See a complete exposure of the whole system in Mr. F. O. Morris's admirable book on contrapuntal technique.

to St. John, a great number of Psalms and anthems, services for the Protestant ritual, one of which is on the largest scale ever attempted, madrigals, songs, instrumental pieces for strings and for virginals; in any period of musical history this abundance would be exceptional, in these early years it was probably unparalleled. In some directions, too, he was an adventurous pioneer. He was one of the first composers to recognize the value of balance between voice and accompaniment, to write solos with independent organ-part, to divide his madrigals between singers and players, and so to enrich their texture with new combinations of colour and design. The variation-form in which he excelled was so supremely his own that historians have accredited him with its invention: most important of all, the string pieces of 1611 are not reduplications of madrigalian music, 'apt for viols or voyces', but genuine concerted works for instruments the structure of which clearly anticipates the cyclic forms of the symphony and the string quartet. To his complete mastery of polyphonic resource there is no need to draw attention: that is an achievement which he shares with lesser men, and it is enough to say that his draughtsmanship is worthy of his inspiration. It is of more moment to consider the character of his musical thought: the kind and degree of beauty which it embodies and expresses: premising always that in music more than in any other art, conception and expression are like the convex and concave 'two in word but one in reality'.

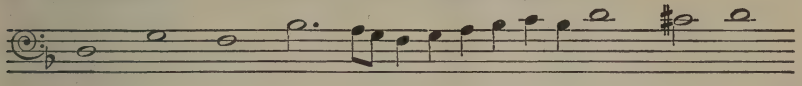
To deal exhaustively with this topic would involve a complete survey of all Byrd's compositions, and that for many reasons is here impossible. But three points may be selected for special elucidation. The first is the magnificent breadth and sweep of his melodic curve; not only in range of compass but in exact propriety of declamation. The latter aspect has been grievously obscured in later times by our habit of printing Elizabethan music in schemes of regular and uniform barring, a method which is entirely destructive of their true prosody. Byrd and his contemporaries wrote before the use of bars had come to supersede the old free rhythm, and their melody flows among triple and quadruple measures according to the requirements of the text. Indeed, one of the reasons why Byrd fell into neglect was because the critics applied to him the wrong metrical footrule and then complained that he would not scan. As a matter of fact his scansion is perfect but it is not that of Bach or Handel. The well-known madrigal 'Though Amaryllis dance in green' is a crucial instance: it was never intended to be performed with a single time-signature.

Secondly we may note the vividness and significance of his themes. The serene purity of style which was one of the beauties of vocal

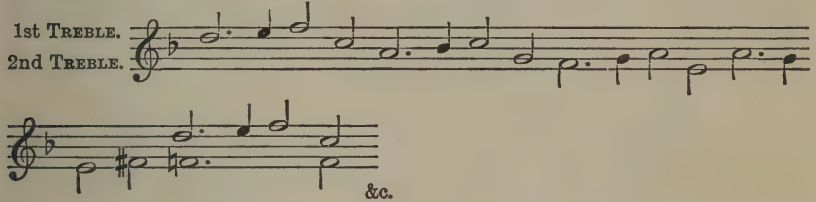
music in the sixteenth century was sometimes protected by a comparatively narrow range of subject: the melodic phrases, admirably suited for contrapuntal treatment, were not always in themselves very fruitful or characteristic. But Byrd's phrases are often as vigorous as those of Bach or Beethoven or Wagner. Such, for instance, is the opening of the five-part 'Haec Dies':



or the bass entry in the three-part 'Regina Caeli':



or the Alleluias in the second of the *Gradualia*:



and instances as salient as these can be found over the whole range of his work. This force and vitality give him at the same time a wide and human sympathy with every true form of emotional expression. His Church music, always devout and dignified, can range from the sheer jubilation of 'Laetentur caeli'[1] to the deep and poignant grief of 'Civitas Sancti Tui'[2] or 'Plorans plorabit'[3]: his madrigals can be gay or humorous or pathetic; even in his instrumental music, with all the necessary limitations of its time, there is sincere feeling behind the courtly reticence of viols and virginals. And throughout it all there breathes an air of certainty and conviction which is one of the distinguishing marks of genius. 'If I were asked', says Mr. Steuart Wilson, 'why I believe that "the sea is His and He made it" I should answer "because Byrd tells me so".'

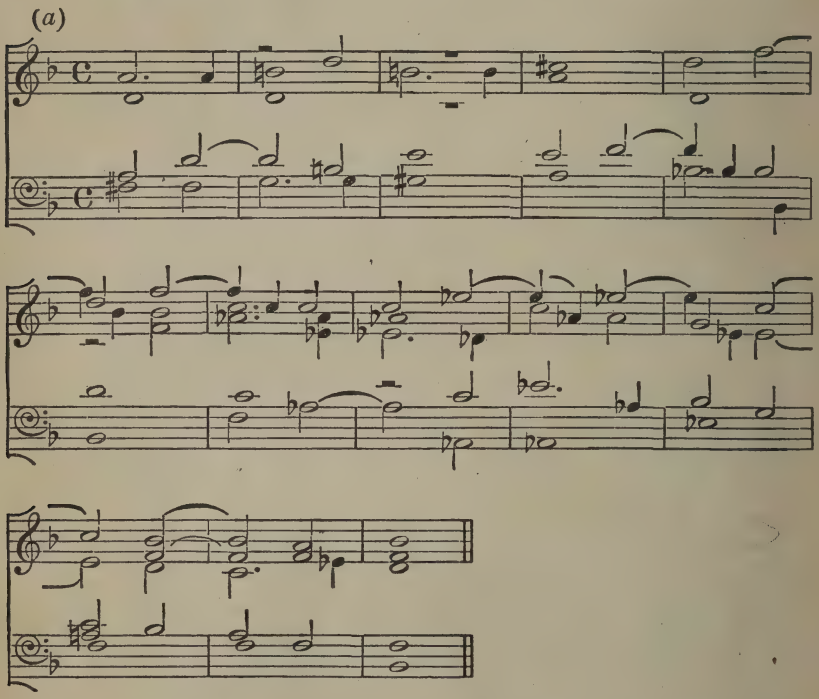
The third characteristic is the originality and audacity of his harmonic experiments. We may recall, without undue technicality, that a strict adherence to the modal system was incompatible either with change of tonal centres or with variety of harmonic colour and substance. But by the end of the sixteenth century the modes had been reduced, in practical currency, to two, and the balance of usage

[1] *Cantiones Sacrae*, i. 28. [2] *Cantiones Sacrae*, i. 21.
[3] *Gradualia*, i. 27.

was gradually swinging towards the employment of the modern scale, for which the conventions of *musica ficta* had long been preparing.

In this matter the English composers had made the farthest advance. In Italy the modes were still in the ascendant and their supremacy was challenged only by rebels like the Prince of Venosa, who does not really come into the comparison. But the Englishmen were using the double idiom for systematic experiment in harmony and modulation: there are instances in some of Weelkes's madrigals which are surprisingly 'modern' in effect: and among them all Byrd's methods were the ripest and the most mature. Some of his devices, like the unprepared dominant seventh, are so familiar to us now that they need no comment: but it is difficult to believe that, even as late as 1611, a madrigalist of the old school could write as follows[1]:

(*a*)

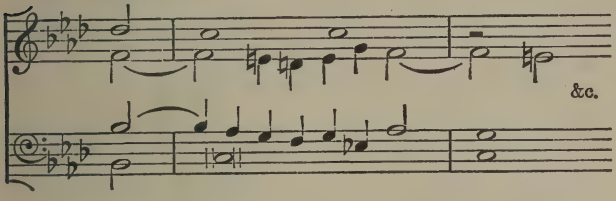


The whole scheme is perfectly clear and logical, but it was a 'new music' at the beginning of the seventeenth century. A striking

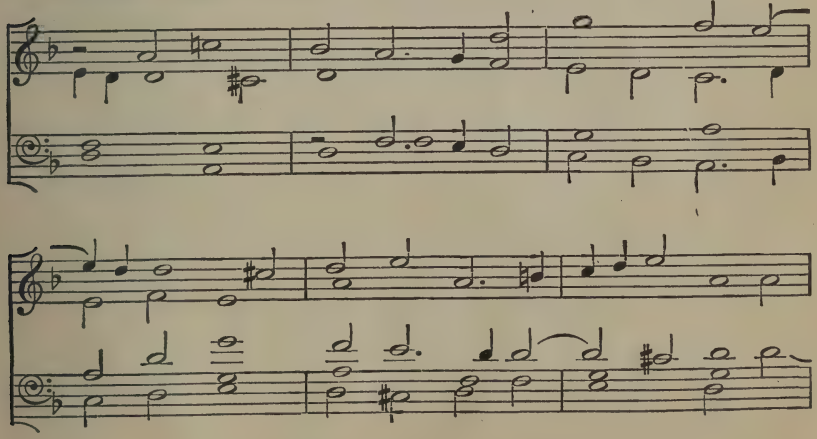
[1] From 'Come woeful Orpheus', from Psalms, Songs, and Sonnets. The words of this particular passage are 'Of sourest sharps and uncouth flats make choice'; so that the music is evidently intended to be partly descriptive: but even so it is sufficiently remarkable. Special attention is drawn to it by Mr. F. O. Morris, *Contrapuntal Technique*, p. 66, and also p. 43 of the illustrations.

instance of this harmonic freedom is to be found in Byrd's famous 'false relations': the device by which he uses the sharpened and natural form of the same note successively in different parts or even simultaneously in one clashing discord. It was evidently intentional, for Byrd in one passage warns the singers not to suppose that the parts are misprinted—a supposition which, two hundred years later, was attached on the same issue to one of Mozart's finest string quartets. It has been subjected to the most absurd criticism,[1] and even now there are some editors who are inclined to speak of it apologetically. There is not the least need for apology. Apart from an extended use of the *Tierce de Picardie*, which is too obvious for discussion, all the examples so far as I know fall into two categories and are covered by two explanations: the double form of what we should call the ascending and descending minor scale, and the fact that in the sixteenth century augmented intervals were not included in the vocabulary of music. Two examples may be given, one of the successive, one of the simultaneous employment of these notes:

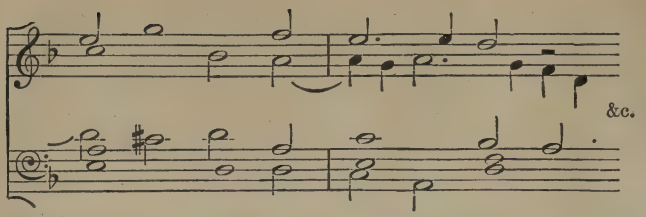
(*b*) From the 'Gloria' of the Mass in four parts.



(*c*) From 'Aspice domine': *Cantiones Sacrae*, Bk. I, no. 13.



[1] See Horsley's edition of the *Cantiones*.



In the former of these it is clear that the exigencies of drawing require the alto to sing E natural and the tenor E flat. In the latter the dissonances of the first and sixth measures are very expressive, that of the fifth is extraordinarily beautiful as well. And we are not likely to quarrel at the present day with an artist who, on wholly intelligible grounds, extended the use of passing discords.

The technique of his composition for viols and for virginals is naturally affected by the particular qualities and limitations of the instruments. The virginals were incapable either of sustained tone or of graduation of touch; it followed that the music written for them made considerable use of grace notes, and arpeggios, and running passages which were often treated as constituent parts of the melody. The forms which Byrd most commonly used were those of dance measures: the Pavan and Galliard often in collocation, the others usually separate: or of 'ayres', with or without variations, or of 'fantasies' which first applied to the keyboard the fugal style which had been gradually elaborated for voices. In all alike, even to the point of elaborately ornamental melody, he was one of the earliest and worthiest forerunners of the clavier writing of J. S. Bach.

String music was still held by a self-imposed restriction. Though Andrea Amati was born in 1520, the modern stringed instruments had not yet found their way into favour: they were regarded as harsh and intrusive; in the middle of the seventeenth century Mace can still talk of the 'scoulding violins'. Hence all through Byrd's lifetime the 'Consort' was still composed of viols, treble, tenor, and bass, which had far less agility and resonance, but compensated for this, at least in part, by a reedy sweetness of tone which fitted their music and partly no doubt inspired it. As an example of Byrd's composition for strings we may take the sestet of 1611, to which allusion has already been made. It is in three movements: the first broad and dignified, treating in close imitation a series of short well-defined themes, the second a lilting allegro, with great variety of key, the third a charming and delicate minuet which shows already a remarkable sense of thematic development. The whole work has far more than an historic interest: it is a real and valuable contribution to the literature of chamber-music.

Yet in all this analysis we are but emulating the hero of the Greek story who, wishing to sell his house, carried round a brick by way of sample. No amount of illustration, short of a complete programme, can give any idea of Byrd's fertility of invention, of his strength and vigour, of his skill, his humanity, his high and noble seriousness of purpose. He has been compared to Palestrina, with whom indeed he had one curious point of contact,[1] but the comparison is not more fruitful than would be one between the abundance of Shakespeare and the faultless perfection of Dante. This at any rate may with confidence be maintained, that in him the music of our country achieved its highest and fullest expression, and that future ages will set him in the company of the greatest masters, and will grant him equality of renown.

NOTE

A catalogue of Byrd's compositions, so far as they have yet been discovered, is printed in Dr. Fellowes's biography. It comprises :

For the Latin Service : 3 Masses and 219 Motets, Graduals, and other choral works.

For the English Service : 2 sets of Preces and Psalms, 1 of Preces and Responses, 1 Litany, 2 complete Services, 2 Evening Services, 1 Morning Service (fragment), and 85 anthems.

Madrigals and other Secular Songs : 112.

Concerted pieces for Viols : 19.

Pieces for Virginals : 111.

Pieces for Lute : 3.

Miscellaneous instrumental pieces : 21.

[1] The Canon 'Non nobis Domine', a copy of which engraved on a golden plate is said to have been deposited in the Vatican, has been attributed to both composers. The theme is to be found in the first *Agnus* of Palestrina's *Missa Brevis*, but from this no argument can be drawn, and contemporary testimony is in favour of Byrd.

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